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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether the benefits currently afforded to Kentucky school council members functioned as incentives for teachers to participate in local school governance and management. Public school teachers in a mid-sized Kentucky school district were asked to read and evaluate recruitment messages that emphasized the benefits to be gained from their service on a school council. The recruitment message content contained the collective set of informal rewards being offered in various schools and stipulated the connection between council work, improved student performance, and the acquisition of school-based financial awards. Data analysis indicated that the existing benefits failed to attract most teachers to school council service. Relatively inexperienced teachers and experienced teachers responded differently to the benefits depicted in the recruitment messages. Relatively inexperienced teachers rated job descriptions more positively than relatively experienced teachers when the job description emphasized pecuniary job benefits. There were no significant differences when the job description emphasized nonpecuniary job benefits. (Contains 31 references.) (SM)

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Do the Benefits Associated with School Council Membership Function as Incentives for Teachers to Seek the Position?

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Do the Benefits Associated with School Council Membership Function as Incentives for Teachers to Seek the Position?

Following the publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and reports such as A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986), state and local policymakers initiated a variety of reforms designed to improve the quality of public schools. One such reform initiative, site-based decision making, devolves decision making authority to the local school and holds on-site personnel accountable for improving student learning. The purpose of site-based decision making is to improve schools by recruiting and retaining a high caliber of teachers and providing a better work organization (Hart & Murphy, 1990).

For site-based decision making to achieve its promise, teachers must be willing to participate. The mere establishment of participative policies and procedures may not guarantee willing and meaningful teacher involvement (Smylie, 1992). In addition to creating participative vehicles, policymakers may need to consider whether the benefits to teachers are commensurate with and can be acquired as a result of teacher efforts. Benefits that teachers value and can anticipate as a result of their efforts function as incentives to influence teacher attitudes and behaviors. Providing incentives for teachers may be necessary to maintain even the current level of involvement (Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994).

This article reports the results of a study examining whether the benefits currently afforded to school council members function as incentives for teachers to participate in local school governance and management. The study site was a

medium-sized public school district in Kentucky. As a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA), state legislators mandated that public schools establish councils to design and implement policy at the local level. Recent empirical studies (Newton & Winter, 1999; Winter, Keedy, & Newton, 2000) suggest that Kentucky teachers may be less than enthusiastic about seeking council service.

Research Context

Although Kentucky public school teachers are not paid for council membership, KERA provides financial awards (ranging from $1,300 to $2,600 per teacher) to individual schools when council members establish policies or make decisions that raise student achievement to a predetermined level (David, 1994; Harp, 1995). Because many factors, in addition to teacher efforts, influence student performance, teachers cannot be assured that the awards will result from their efforts as council members (Kelley & Protsik, 1997).

To facilitate policy implementation, many district and school personnel provide teachers with both extrinsic rewards such as additional funds for professional development and intrinsic rewards such as public recognition for serving as a council member (Robertson, Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1995; Wohlstetter, et al., 1994). The availability of such rewards exists at the discretion of those implementing the restructuring policy and, therefore, may or may not be available to an individual teacher.

Intrinsic rewards, such as the opportunity to engage in a broader range of decisions, are inherent to the participative opportunity and, therefore, should be consistently available to participating teachers. In practice, however, principals

determine the amount of authority shared with teachers and the style with which it is shared (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). In Kentucky, some middle and high school teachers perceive the principal as authoritarian (David, 1994).

Should organizational representatives alter the minimal and loosely-structured benefits accruing to teacher members of school councils? To generate empirical evidence to inform restructuring policies, we designed a study to assess whether the collective benefits for teacher members of Kentucky school councils influence teacher attraction to the position. The study participants read and evaluated recruitment messages emphasizing the benefits to be gained from school council service. The recruitment message content contained the collective set of informal rewards being offered in various schools and stipulated the connection between council work, improved student performance, and the acquisition of school-based financial awards.

Related Literature

Educational leaders have designed an array of plans to motivate teachers to improve schools. Merit pay, an economic incentive offered to individual teachers, is designed to "define, measure, and reward performance in order to more closely align individual and organizational goals" (Heneman & Young, 1991, p. 36). With few exceptions, teachers reacted so negatively to merit pay programs that they have been largely discontinued (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Heneman & Young, 1991; Kelley & Protsik, 1997).

The career ladder is a form of work redesign that enables teachers to obtain both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards by moving upward through a series of ranks

including novice teacher, regular teacher, and teacher leader. Teacher reactions to career ladders tend to vary with levels of teacher experience (Conley & Levinson, 1993). Less experienced teachers seem to derive satisfaction from both the intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding aspects of their work. More experienced teachers tend to derive their greatest satisfaction from the intrinsically rewarding dimensions of their work.

The purpose of school-based awards is to motivate teachers to collaborate more with other teachers (Firestone, 1994). The idea is that productivity and effectiveness can be enhanced by setting goals, moving implementation decisions to the local level, rewarding those who reach the established goals, and sanctioning those who do not (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). Kelley and Protsik (1997) investigated the effects of Kentucky's school-based performance award program on teacher motivation. Many teachers valued and worked to achieve the monetary awards. However, teacher motivation seemed to be equally related to nonmonetary incentives such as the fear of sanctions and the desire for public recognition.

Methodology

We examined teacher reactions to recruitment message content emphasizing the benefits for seeking a vacant position on a school council. We tested three one-way hypotheses: (a) job benefits (pecuniary, nonpecuniary) will influence teacher attraction for school council service; (b) teacher attraction to school council service will vary according to teacher job experience (relatively inexperienced, experienced); and (c) job benefits (pecuniary, nonpecuniary) and teacher job experience (relatively

inexperienced, experienced) will interact to influence teacher attraction for school council service.

Study Participants

We invited all certified teachers employed by a medium-sized (10,000 students) public school district in Kentucky to participate in the research. Two hundred teachers from two elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools completed the study instruments. Demographically, the study participants were comparable to the national profile of current teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). The majority of the participants were female (72%), white (97%) and in their mid-thirties ($\underline{M}$ = 38.7). The participating high school teachers were more experienced ($\underline{M}$ = 6.2) than either the elementary school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 3.9) or the middle school teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 1.7).

Independent Variables

A multi-step procedure recommended by Anastasi (1976) established content validity for the benefits highlighted in the job descriptions. We adopted the following operational definitions of pecuniary and non-pecuniary job benefits. Pecuniary job benefits include all decisions and activities that require an expenditure of funds by organizational representatives. Nonpecuniary job benefits include all decisions and activities that do not require an expenditure of funds by organizational representatives.

We generated a list of job benefits from studies conducted in Kentucky public schools (Robertson, et al., 1995; Wohlstetter, et al., 1994). Five principals used a q-sort procedure to categorize the benefits as either pecuniary benefits or nonpecuniary

benefits. Twenty-two certified teachers used 5-point Likert-type scales (with five being a more positive rating) to rate the importance of the benefits. We ranked the benefits within each category from highest to lowest based on mean score and generated pairs of benefits that were equivalent or nearly equivalent. We calculated overlap statistics to establish equivalency for each pair of job benefits (Dunnette, 1966, Tilton, 1937). The overlap percentages for the pairs of benefits used in the job descriptions ranged from 92% to 98%.

This process yielded the pecuniary and nonpecuniary job benefits (see Table 1) used to create two versions of the job of school council member. We included only one category of benefits in each version of the job description to assure that the prospect of obtaining pecuniary benefits did not mitigate the influence of the nonpecuniary benefits (see Johnson, 1986 for literature supporting this notion)

Insert Table 1 About Here

We conducted a pilot study to measure participant sensitivity to the manipulation of the pecuniary and nonpecuniary job benefits. Experienced teachers ($\underline{N}$ = 24) read one version of the job description and completed a two-item questionnaire. Because all of the participants perceived the manipulations as intended, we used the piloted versions of the job descriptions in the actual study. On a demographic form, participating teachers who had been teaching for ten years or fewer than ten years identified themselves as "relatively inexperienced."

Teachers who had been teaching for more than ten years identified themselves as "experienced."

Dependent Variable

The measure for the dependent variable was an additive composite score composed of two items: (a) "How likely would you be to pursue the job of school council member described?" and (b) "How likely would you be to run for the job of school council member if nominated by other teachers?" Teachers used 5-point Likert-type scales with two anchors (1 = Not at all Likely; 5 = Very Likely) to rate these items. A similar approach to measurement of the dependent variable has been used in previous educational recruitment studies (Winter, 1996; Young, Rinehart, & Heneman, 1993).

Principals in the participating schools administered the study instruments at faculty meetings. Each participant completed a biographical data form and evaluated one job description emphasizing either pecuniary job benefits or nonpecuniary job benefits. We used a 2 x 2 completely crossed fixed-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the hypotheses at the .05 level of statistical significance.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the teacher ratings of the job descriptions appear in Table 2. Teachers rated both versions of the job below the midpoint of 3 on the two 5-point scales measuring attraction to the job. Relatively inexperienced teachers rated both job descriptions more positively than did experienced teachers.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Table 3 contains the results of the two-way analysis of variance. At the .05 level of significance, two effects were detected: (a) a main effect for teacher job experience [F (1, 128) = 5.23, $p < .05$] and (b) a job benefits by teacher job experience interaction [F (1, 128) = 4.23, $p < .05$]. Calculations for omega-squared (Keppel, 1991, p. 439) indicated that the significant interaction effect accounted for 10% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Insert Table 3 About Here

The simple effect for job benefits when the job description emphasized pecuniary job benefits was significant [F (1, 64), 10.1, $p. < .05$]. However, the simple effect for job benefits when the job description emphasized nonpecuniary job benefits was not significant [F (1, 64), .02, $p. > .05$].

When the job description emphasized pecuniary job benefits, relatively inexperienced teachers rated the job descriptions significantly more positively (M = 5.94) than did experienced teachers (M = 4.21). Yet, when the job description emphasized nonpecuniary job benefits, there was no significant difference (M = 5.09; M = 5.00) in ratings across levels of teacher job experience.

Discussion/Implications/Future Research

We believe two major findings warrant discussion. First, we analyze why the

overall job ratings were modest even though the recruitment messages highlighted the benefits of school council service. Second, we discuss why relatively inexperienced teachers and experienced teachers responded differently to the benefits depicted in the recruitment messages.

Why did the existing benefits fail to attract most teachers to school council service? The tenets of three process theories (expectancy theory, equity theory, job enrichment theory) explain how factors interact to affect employee motivation. Perhaps the benefits examined in this research failed to meet the conditions of these theories.

Expectancy theory predicts that benefits will influence employee attitudes and behaviors when the benefits are valued and can be anticipated as a consequence of employee efforts (Johnson, 1986). Because the job descriptions stipulated that teacher members of school councils could anticipate the benefits emphasized in the job descriptions, it is probable that most teachers do not value them. Teachers, particularly veteran teachers, may view defraying the actual or potential costs of participation (liability insurance) or facilitating the acquisition of new competencies and skills (stipends for council training) as routine job support measures rather than rewards.

Equity theory predicts that individuals will respond positively to benefits that represent just compensation for their work (Johnson, 1986). Under KERA, the school-based awards are distributed to the schools and teachers decide how to distribute the funds. Both teachers and principals report being dissatisfied with this system (Kelley & Protsik, 1997). Typically, teachers who are not members of the

school council and teachers who are council members benefit equally. Awarding all teachers equally may function as a disincentive for teachers to seek council membership. To better establish the link between council work, school improvement, and obtaining school-based financial awards, policymakers may consider awarding more substantive portions of the financial awards to council members.

Job enrichment theory predicts that employees will be attracted to enriching and challenging work (Johnson, 1986). Much of the work of school councils involves managing the school. Previous research has shown that talented beginning teachers tend to avoid leadership opportunities that are not clearly connected to the work of teaching (Hart & Murphy, 1990). Experimental studies conducted in the research context (Newton & Winter, 1999; Winter, Keedy, Newton 2000) found that many experienced teachers prefer the traditional model of schooling where teachers teach and principals manage. Teachers may not consider making decisions related to school management a form of job enrichment.

Relatively inexperienced teachers rated each of the two job descriptions (see Table 2) more positively than did experienced teachers. The career stage of the responding teacher may account for this finding. During the first decade of their career, teachers move through three career stages (Huberman, 1988). In stage one (1-6 years job experience) teachers experience either an easy or painful beginning. In stage two (4-8 years job experience) teachers stabilize and diversify, possibly as a result of acquiring tenure. It is not until stage three (6-10 years job experience) that teachers are open to new challenges, willing to experiment, and likely to assume

responsibility. The willingness of teachers with 6-10 years of job experience to assume responsibility may account for the higher overall ratings of the job descriptions by relatively inexperienced teachers.

The tendency for veteran teachers to contract rather than expand their jobs may account for the less positive overall rating of experienced teachers. As a result of their experiences with school reform efforts, veteran teachers become either positively focused, defensively focused, or disenchanted (Huberman, 1988). Positively-focused teachers have invested extensively in school reform and now want to avoid involvement in school-wide innovations. Negatively-focused teachers have resisted school reform initiatives and now want to reduce commitments because they disapprove of the outcomes of reform. Disenchanted teachers initially approved of the school reform initiatives but have since become disappointed and bitter about the outcomes.

The differences in the ratings of pecuniary benefits by relatively inexperienced and experienced teachers may reflect the presence or absence of financial need. For teachers at the lower end of the salary scale, even minor pecuniary benefits may be needed to facilitate participation. Teachers at the higher end of the salary scale are more financially solvent and, therefore, are less likely to need or value minor pecuniary benefits.

The benefit structure examined in this study does not appear to generate the quantity, and perhaps quality, of teacher leaders needed to support the goals of school reform. This finding argues for re-evaluating both the pecuniary and nonpecuniary benefits associated with school council service. Distributing the

school-based financial awards in a more equitable manner and providing more substantive rewards obtained for performing council work may improve the motivational capacity of the pecuniary benefits. Providing staff development opportunities for council chairs may enhance the value of the nonpecuniary benefits to be gained by participating in collaborative decision making.

Additional studies should be conducted in other settings to determine if teachers in settings and districts where participative opportunities are not mandated respond in similar fashion. Also, the interaction between teacher career stages and willingness to assume teacher leadership roles warrants further study. Perhaps there is an optimal window of opportunity (6-10 years of experience) for inducing teachers to engage in leadership. Finally, we encourage the examination of teacher reactions to an array of benefits for school council service. By design, both the range of benefits and the levels of the benefits examined in this research were very narrow because we limited our examination to the influence of the collective body of benefits that can be earned by teachers in the research context.

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Table 1

Categories of Benefits Manipulated in the Job Descriptions

Pecuniary Job Benefits Highlighted in Job Description 1
Serving on a council in a school eligible for financial awards
Stipend for attending council training
Funds for elective inservice
Reimbursement for meals when attending council training
Free liability insurance
Nonpecuniary Job Benefits Highlighted in Job Description 2
Meaningful work
Decision making variety
More control over the work environment
Eligibility to serve as council chair
Meetings conducted in a professional manner

Table 2

Summary of Cell Means and Standard Deviations for Job Ratings Varied by Job Benefits and Teacher Job Experience

Teacher Job Experience		Relatively Inexperienced	Experienced
Job Benefits			
Pecuniary	M	5.94	4.21
	SD	2.41	1.98
Nonpecuniary	M	5.09	5.00
	SD	2.44	2.28

Note. Means and standard deviations are based on two-item additive composite scores. The composite scores range from 2 to 10 with 6 being the midpoint. A higher number reflects a more positive rating.

Coefficient Alpha for two items = .92

N = 132

n = 33

Table 3

Analysis of Variance for Applicant Reaction by Job Benefits and Teacher Job Experience

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Benefits	1	.03	.03	.00
Job Experience	1	27.27	27.27	5.23 *
Benefits x Experience	1	22.09	22.09	4.23 *
Error	128	668.12	5.22	
Total	131	717.52		

Coefficient Alpha = .92

N = 132

* $p < .05$